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Stephanie Rawlings-Blake: Calm and methodical, but decisive



It's been less than a week since Baltimore City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake learned that she would become mayor next month, and it was clear in an hourlong meeting with The Sun's editorial board this morning that she does not yet have all the answers for solving the major challenges the city faces, from its budget shortfall to the collapse of a plan for slot machine gambling here. To her credit, she doesn't pretend to,

either. She gave definitive answers where she could -- for example, that she plans to retain Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III -- but otherwise conveyed a solid approach to setting priorities and making public policy. Under the circumstances, that is the best we can hope for.

Ms. Rawlings-Blake is not a larger-than-life presence in the way a muscle shirt-clad, guitar-strumming Martin O'Malley was when he was first elected, and she's not the blunt, sharp-edged fighter that Mayor Sheila Dixon is. The comparison to those two has led many to conclude that Ms. Rawlings-Blake's calm seriousness reflects disengagement. That does not appear to be the case. She thinks before she answers and speaks carefully, but she is not equivocal.

In particular, she was clearer this morning than just about any elected Democrat in the state in condemning the actions that led to Mayor Dixon's resignation. "I think it's pretty obvious," she said. "A jury of her peers felt strongly that she acted outside the law. That speaks for itself." She did not condemn State Prosecutor Robert

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strongly that she acted outside the law. That speaks for itself. She did not condemn state prosecutor Robert Rohrbaugh for accepting a plea deal that will leave Ms. Dixon with her \$83,000 a year pension and, potentially, a clean criminal record, but she did say she intends to seek changes to make elected officials' pensions less generous in the future. "I understand people are very upset about the prospect of a lifetime pension," she said. "I get it."

(Sun photo: Amy Davis)

Ms. Rawlings-Blake said she has been looking into the city's ethics laws already and intends reforms to tighten them up. In particular, she said the current composition of the Board of Ethics, which is controlled by mayoral appointees, needs an overhaul to add independence. That's admirable considering she, soon, will be the one making the appointments. Likewise, her desire to cut back on the city's cable channel, which is now little more than a glorified infomercial for the mayor, has not changed with the prospect that she is the one whose face would be on TV.

On the budget, Ms. Rawlings-Blake is rejecting the notion of across-the-board cuts. That is wise because such an approach cuts the successful just as much as the wasteful. She leaves open the possibility that the city could seek new revenues -- such as a higher tax for vacant properties -- but she said a general property tax increase should be the last resort.

She said she believes rotating firehouse closures are better than permanently shuttering stations, but she said the department was near the breaking point and that she would seek to minimize that practice.

On crime, Ms. Rawlings-Blake argued for a middle path between zero-tolerance and community oriented policing, saying she favors Commissioner Bealefeld's approach and would seek to continue productive partnerships with state and federal officials that have led to recent reductions in violence.

Education is a particular passion for the mayor-to-be, and she said she is strongly supportive of city schools CEO Andres Alonso's reform efforts and of the expansion of programs such as Teach for America.

And on slots, she said she would do what it takes to make sure the prime piece of property the failed bidders for the city's slots license secured would be available for new proposals.

The weeks ahead will be crucial as Ms. Rawlings-Blake decides which members of Mayor Dixon's administration to keep and which ones to replace, as she crafts a budget and argues for the city's priorities during the General Assembly session in Annapolis. We will soon have a good sense of how effective she will be in making the transition from the legislative branch to the executive. But two things that can be judged now are her temperament and her priorities, and those appear to be sound.

Posted by **Andy Green** at 11:53 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#)

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Sheila Dixon has to step down in disgrace. I don't agree with the things she did, but I also believe she is not the only one.

When Martin O'Malley and Barak Obama got elected in to office I thought they would would benefit Baltimore and cities. I was wrong. Neither has proven to be a friend to the city. O'M has done nothing, and Obama just wants to throw more money into welfare type programs. Welfare has proven to be more of a problem than anything else in the cities. Both have funded massive freeway infrastructure development and so far both